

## **"GENERATIONS OF WOMEN MOVING HISTORY FORWARD"**

*Rachel Turner is an 8th grade student at Clarksville Middle School. Her essay on Ruby Bridges won the middle school division of this year's Women's Commission Essay Contest.*

### **Ruby Bridges**

by Rachel Turner

I knew right away whom I wanted to write my essay about. This is because of this year's theme, "Generations of Women Moving History Forward". What stood out to me was "moving history forward". I thought of Ruby Bridges. When thinking about what Ruby Bridges did, it was obvious how her life related to this year's theme.

It all started in the spring of 1960 when 6-year-old Ruby took a test, along with other African-Americans in New Orleans to see who would go to an integrated school. Ruby passed the test and had been chosen to start first grade at Frantz Public School. On November 14th federal marshals drove Ruby and her mother to the school. As Ruby and her mother pulled up to the school, as expected, people shouted and shook their fist when Ruby and her mother got out of the car but she held her mother's hand and followed the marshals through the crowd and up the steps to the school. In all the uproar Ruby never got to her classroom.

The next day, the marshals drove Ruby and her mother to school. As Ruby and her mother went into the building a young woman met them inside the building, smiled and said, "Good morning, Ruby Nell," She then said, "Welcome, I'm your new teacher, Mrs. Henry."

From that day on Ruby attended class everyday as the number of protesters decreased. Throughout all of this Ruby prayed, and God was enough to help get through that difficult time. One morning when Mrs. Henry watched Ruby walk to school she said she'd been surprised to see Ruby talk to the mob. She said, "I saw your lips moving, but I couldn't make out what you were saying to those people." Ruby replied, "I wasn't talking to them, I was praying for them." In her prayer Ruby asked God to please be with her and to be with the people outside too. She also asked God to forgive them because they didn't know what they're doing. After hearing this Mrs. Henry whispered, "Ruby Nell, you are truly something special."

Years later, Ruby began volunteering at William Frantz and had the feeling that God had brought her back to her past for a reason. She got on her knees and prayed, "Lord, whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing, you'll have to show me." In 1993, a reporter called the school about the psychiatrist Robert Coles who had written a children's book called The Story of Ruby Bridges. Ruby says that to her, "It was God's way of keeping my story alive until I was able to tell it myself."

Because of what Ruby went through in first grade, people recognize her name and want to hear what she has to say about racism and education. These days, Ruby speaks to groups around the

country. She tells students her story and talks about the lessons of the past and how we can still learn from them today like that every child is a unique human being fashioned by God and that schools can be a place to bring children together of all races and backgrounds. Ruby says, “It’s my way of continuing what God set in motion 40 years ago when he led me up the steps of William Fratz Public School and into a new world with my teacher, Mrs. Henry – a world that under His protection has reached for beyond just the two of us in that classroom.”

As you can see, Ruby Bridges life and accomplishments in integration, schools, and with children has contributed to moving history forward.